



Cultivating Leadership



Summer 2015
Continuous Living Cover Series

photo: field-edge monitor in St. Croix River watershed, Julia Olmstead

Leadership needs identified by Prairie STRIPS Project listening sessions in Iowa:

- Development of capacity of conservation agencies to provide technical assistance on Continuous Living Cover practices
- Information on ways for CLC acres to provide farm income
- Development of sources of financial support to offset establishment costs and opportunity costs of practices
- Increase understanding of and ability to articulate on-farm, off-farm, and long-term benefits of practices
- Establishment of demonstration sites to increase awareness and eventual adoption of practices

Source: Investigating opportunities for enhancing farmer adoption of strategically targeted prairie strips in Iowa. Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture Competitive Grant Report P2012-08.

Agricultural and natural resource professionals who advise farmers are leaders in their communities.

Farmers are asking for leadership from their advisors on matters of cropping system changes for soil and water protection.

Farmers are also interested in becoming leaders among their peers on these matters.

Cultivation of leadership on Continuous Living Cover needs to happen at both the farm advisor level and the farmer level.

Theory of Change: When farmers are directly involved in monitoring and they understand pollution sources, they will be able to internalize and see the need to address this on their own farms.

Farmer-Led Councils in the St. Croix River Watershed

Farmer-Led Councils have been in operation since late 2012; currently there are four councils established. The broad goal of the agencies involved is reduction of phosphorus in the St. Croix River, to attempt to meet Total Maximum Daily Loads

(TMDLs) for P. Farmers' goals center around soil health and productivity. Leadership development is a central piece of the effort. The councils operate at the HUC-12 watershed level: watersheds of 8,000 to 20,000 acres. Council members meet over the winter to design the program for the next season. A menu of practices is developed and all farmers in the watershed are eligible to apply for incentives (\$200 to \$1,000 per farmer) on a first-come, first-served basis.

Challenges:

- Lots of education, trust-building, and facilitation is needed. It requires a dedicated staff person to administer the groups.
- Funding. Farmer-led councils don't fit cleanly under NRCS practices or other conservation programs.
- Social and spatial relationships. If a large-scale farmer at the top of the watershed is not involved, soil and nutrient loss from their operation may trump the efforts of those working downstream. That creates tension among peers.
- Diversity and definition of sustainability. The types of farmers involved range from large-scale crop farmers to organic graziers; it's a challenge to get everyone on the same page.

Complex Organizational Structure:

- Funding for the councils comes from McKnight Foundation, with Wisconsin Farmers Union as the fiscal agent.
- Four county land departments each contribute a ½-time conservation planner.
- Wisconsin DNR funds the project coordinator through University of Wisconsin-Extension.
- The farmers on the councils serve in an advisory role.
- The coordinator (Julia Olmstead) stitches it all together.

The project has established edge-of-field monitors to track water coming off fields on several farms with different cropping systems. These are frequently used for farm tours; the differences between cropping systems are very apparent. Farmer participation has been good and leadership development is being tracked, but the project has not yet seen many changes in cropping systems. It's a slow process toward change.

Cover Crop Champions

The National Wildlife Federation established the Cover Crop Champions program to increase use of cover crops. It started with an understanding of how farmers innovate: taking in information first; then prioritizing it with higher value placed on local information from a known source. That understanding led to an emphasis on getting farmers who were already using cover crops to be the key messengers about cover crops to other farmers.

Development of leadership in these Champions is based on three core ideas:

- Communicating at the right level and using the right language
- Getting to core values
- Being a reliable resource

Interest and capacity of farmers to be Cover Crop Champions is determined through an application process and evaluation of the applicants. Criteria include the farmer's knowledge level and what their status is within their community.

Equipping is a key piece of the program. A lesson learned is that the Champions love the idea of helping their neighbors learn about cover crops, but don't generally like public speaking. A two-day media and presentation training session taught farmers how to deliver information, show statistics, tell stories, and how to do sound bites and press releases; converting them into top-notch communicators.

Continuing support and education is another key piece. A listserv and regular conference call were established to provide opportunities for Champions to network with each other, get up-to-date information on current research, and receive additional training on communication strategies from NWF staff.

Professional communications staff serve as support staff for the farmers in this program, and that has worked very well. The Cover Crop Champions program has seen tremendous success in terms of media coverage.

More about Cover Crop Champions: <http://blog.nwf.org/2014/05/meet-the-cover-crop-champions/>

"It's hard for those of us in jobs with a public relations component to really comprehend the fear of public speaking, because we do it all the time. With the Cover Crop Champions, their spirit was very willing but they sometimes had a very hard time with public speaking. I cannot overstate the value of the communications training to get the farmers the tools that they need to be effective communicators."

- Ryan Stockwell, National Wildlife Federation

Pollinator Habitat Project with General Mills

Linda Meschke, director of Rural Advantage (ruraladvantage.org) facilitated development of a pilot project to establish pollinator habitat on farms with financial support from General Mills. She founded the “Conservation Marketplace Midwest” (CMM) as an entity to handle and distribute these funds. The funding provides farmers with money to cover habitat establishment costs,

estimated at \$760/acre for herbicide treatment, site preparation, seed, and planting. The



Pollinator Habitat Initiative

Purpose: Increase the number of acres of high quality habitat and forage for pollinators in Minnesota.

Goal: Establish 20 acres of pollinator habitat, on approximately 10 sites.

Objective: Establish a pilot project package exploring implementation requirements for pollinator habitat. Pollinator habitat site requirements can vary between targeting managed bees or native pollinators.

funding also provides \$75 per half-acre per year to the farmers for five years to keep the habitat in place.

Four pollinator habitat practices can be funded under this initiative:

New Establishment: Plantings established on freshly tilled sites following the Pollinator Habitat Credit guidance.

Buffers: Newly planted buffers along open drainage ditches or in riparian areas, to be established following the Pollinator Habitat Credit guidance. These buffers can provide multiple benefits including sediment reduction, water quality improvement and carbon sequestration.

Enhancement: Pollinator plant species can be inter-seeded into existing native plantings to meet the criteria in the Pollinator Habitat Credit guidance. Examples of these areas include private lands, CRP, CREP, RIM and expired CRP. Any enhancements on land in a contract or easement must have the permission of the cooperating agency before approval by CMM.

Forage/Bioenergy: Alfalfa, clover and forage mixes support managed bees. Management would allow harvest only after the bloom period for forage or bioenergy use. This management scheme would not support dairy cattle in milk production but could be utilized by dairy beef, beef, sheep or horses.

Grazing Broker

Laura Paine heads up the Managed Grazing program at Southwest Badger Resource Conservation & Development Council, and fills the position of Grazing Broker. The Grazing Broker makes connections between graziers and owners of grassland, and gets grazing agreements in place in order to use and preserve the existence of grassland.

Non-farming landowners have control of 55% of the agricultural land in the Upper Midwest. That is an important audience for the Continuous Living Cover message, but it is also an audience that is hard to connect with. The Grazing Broker program is working on finding innovative ways to find and engage non-farming landowners. They are discovering that the non-farming landowners frequently are more interested in whole-farm management than they are specifically in grazing contracts, so Southwest Badger is moving in the direction of offering whole-farm planning services that include a grazing component.

They are also finding that many non-farming landowners are not aware of the property tax implications of their land use, and may inadvertently lose their agricultural status by failing to arrange for haying or grazing of their grassland. The Grazing Broker project is working with these landowners to educate them about the value of grazing as a conservation practice.

Laura is finding that there is considerable interest among livestock owners and graziers in finding acreage they can graze, so her challenge now is to get more landowners with grassland on board in order to satisfy the demand for grazing land.

More about the Southwest Badger Managed Grazing Program:

<http://www.swbadger.org/managedgrazing.html>

The premise behind the Grazing Broker project:

- There is grassland in the hands of non-farming landowners
- There are graziers who would like access to that land for grazing
- The two groups do not have a good way to find each other and form grazing agreements

Laura Paine, Grazing Broker
Southwest Badger RC&D Quarterly Report: April-June 2014

Our First Big Success!

Nothing captures the essence of the Grazing Broker project better than the recently established partnership between the Andersons and the Muellers. David Anderson (white tee-shirt) is a landowner whose goal is to use managed grazing to attract grassland birds to his property near Highland. Matt (next to David) and Mike Mueller are conservation-minded beef producers from the Livingston area looking for pastures to rent. Both attended our Grazing Broker 2013-2014 winter workshops.



Through a combination of EQIP funding, out-of-pocket investment, and ‘sweat-equity’, David has turned 45 acres of expired CRP pine trees into a managed grazing system. After delays getting fencing and watering installed and storm-caused power outages, it was finally ready for cattle on July 2nd.



The 30 Normande-Short Horn cross heifers stepped off the trailer into tall, rank grass and wild parsnips that took off after the pine trees were removed. Undeterred, they explored a little and then went to work grazing. Once this first rotation cycle is completed and the pastures are clipped, the parsnip will be under control (cattle eat them!) and it should be great grazing from here on out.

This is an example of how the grazing broker process works. Participants attend our workshops to learn about their options and meet others with similar interests. As broker, I help guide the formation of partnerships, provide lease templates, facilitate negotiations, and provide mentoring and advice. In this case, David wanted to manage the cattle himself and I’ve helped him learn the nuts-and-bolts of managing a grazing system, setting up temporary fencing and the logistics of rotating the cattle.



Women Caring for the LandSM

The Midwestern based, non-profit organization Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) discovered an untapped conservation outreach opportunity. This realization came after several years of work with women farmers and farmland owners. The opportunity lies within the growing number of women farmland owners in the Midwest. According to WFAN, about half of the farmland owners in the Midwest are women (Women, Food and Agriculture Network, 2012). The great majority of these women are non-operator farmland owners. In many cases they are widows, or have inherited the farmland and rely on a

Of the 45 women who participated in the pilot project in eastern Iowa in 2009, half took at least one conservation action within the following year.
From: "Improving Conservation Outreach to Female Non-Operator Farmland Owners"
 It should be noted that although adoption rates for trainings vary greatly, 50% is a very impressive action rate.

tenant farmer or farm manager to make decisions about the land. Through experience, WFAN has witnessed a strong interest in conservation among these women, but for various reasons, there is a lack of action among the group. In some cases, the women do not know or understand the language or jargon used by agency staff or tenants when discussing conservation or land management. Sometimes it is just a matter of knowing who to contact. Many wives of farmers are very much involved in the farm business but have not been the main contact person.

In the upper Midwest 32 to 53% of the land is farmed by a tenant and 61% of this leased land is owned by females (Women, Food and Agriculture Network, 2012). There are multiple factors that can cause a tenant to be hesitant to adopt conservation practices.

One roadblock is lease length. An Iowa State Extension survey has shown that 80% of Iowa farm leases are year to year. Conservation practices can take many years to show return leaving a tenant hesitant to adopt them with the uncertainty of a short-term lease. Some conservation practices require certain skills and equipment that the operator may not possess, or the tenant might put the responsibility of stewardship in the hands of the landowner (Cox, 2013).

Another barrier to the conservation conversation is the tenant/landlady relationship. Not only is there a conservation language barrier, but the dynamics of the relationship can be fragile or complicated. In many cases the tenant is a family friend, relative, or life-long neighbor. Landladies are hesitant to upset this relationship by suggesting changes to the way the tenant earns his/her livelihood. This concern is not a one-way street. In some situations, the tenant would like to implement conservation

Table 1. Percentage of farmland that is rented by state.†	
Iowa	53%
Illinois	25%
Minnesota	45%
Wisconsin	32%
Missouri	35%
† Based on data collected from the USDA Census of Agriculture 2012 Table 64 for each state.	

practices but worries that the landowner will not understand.

In response to these roadblocks to conservation, WFAN developed the project Women Caring for the LandSM (WCL). WCL is a program designed specifically for this group of non-operator landowners interested in implementing conservation practices on their farms. WCL is a unique program that has been very successful in meeting WFAN's goals of educating and empowering women landowners to implement conservation practices on their land. This prepares participants to start the conservation conversation with NRCS agency staff and farmer tenants.

Through experience, WFAN has learned that by running the meetings in a particular format, there is more success getting the women landowners talking and asking questions. Based on this observation, WFAN has developed and published an award winning curriculum called "Improving Conservation Outreach to Female Non-Operator Farmland Owners" (Women, Food and Agriculture Network, 2012). The curriculum provides detailed guidelines for holding the meeting including such things as when is the best time to hold the meetings, how to publicize, timeline, and funding. The stand-out portion of the curriculum is the methodology. This section discusses the proven methods that have made this program a success, and describes why these methods work. The curriculum closes with 12 suggested activities that are meant to educate the participants and getting them asking questions and discussing conservation.

One of the features that makes the meetings unique, and successful, is that the morning portion is women only. Recent research at Virginia Tech documented the potential negative effect of mixed-gender group dynamics on women's ability to perform tasks in small groups (Kishida et al., 2012), and this has been borne out by observations of Women Caring for the LandSM meetings. Facilitators have found that the participants are more likely to open up and ask questions in a women-only "peer to peer" group. This has been observed even when there is only one man in the room and he is known and well-liked by all of the women present. It is important to note that some view the women-only meetings as discriminatory, and

In 2007 Iowa based outreach project Women, Land and Legacy conducted a series of "Listening Sessions". The sessions were attended by 806 women who own land or live in 22 of Iowa's 99 counties. When the input from women was compiled and analyzed, some key highlights emerged. The highlights include "Women favor implementing conservation practices today to ensure the land can sustain future generations of tomorrow" and "Women exhibit a clear and strong consciousness about land health issues and respect nature intrinsically—not for its productive value, but because it sustains all life" (Women, Land and Legacy, 2007).

they may even be prohibited in cases where federal funding is used to support WCL activities. The WCL curriculum recognizes that the women-only format is not appropriate for every setting, and provides suggestions to meeting organizers on ways to address this issue of group composition dynamics.

Another important aspect of the meetings is that the facilitator and agency staffers present lead by not leading. The meetings are set up in a “learning circle” rather than classroom style. Facilitators and staffers scatter themselves within the circle and there is no “head”. The women take turns telling their story. They are encouraged to talk about their dreams, goals, and challenges in relationship to their farmland.

The results have been very positive. Some participants report a sense of relief and others report increased self-confidence. This empowerment leads to conservation action. Since women make up about half of Midwestern farmland owners, this can mean significant change on the landscape.

Facilitator Jennifer Filipiak notes that there is a lot of interest in cover crops and conservation crop rotation. This focus leads to the natural next step, topic-specific meetings with the potential for Continuous Living Cover (CLC) specific meetings. Jennifer has seen natural leaders in the groups that she has facilitated. Her hope is that the additional topic-specific meetings will encourage these women to step-up and take a “landowner leadership role”. She sees the potential for formation of organizations for non-operator women landowners.

By providing women farmland-owners with the tools they need to make the changes they desire, Women Caring for the LandSM is a win for conservation on Midwestern farmland.

Cox, E. 2013. The Landowner’s Guide to Sustainable Farm Leasing | Sustainable Farm Lease. Available at <http://sustainablefarmlease.org/the-landowners-guide-to-sustainable-farm-leases/> (verified 30 July 2015).

Kishida, K.T., D. Yang, K.H. Quartz, S.R. Quartz, and P.R. Montague. 2012. Implicit signals in small group settings and their impact on the expression of cognitive capacity and associated brain responses. *Philos. Trans. R. Soc. B Biol. Sci.* 367(1589): 704–716 Available at <http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/cgi/doi/10.1098/rstb.2011.0267> (verified 20 July 2015).

Women, Food and Agriculture Network. 2012. Improving Outreach to Female Non-Operator Farmland Owners. Available at http://womencaringfortheland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/7thEdition_1_web.pdf.